

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

May 17, 2022

Helping Children and Families Get and Stay on Healthcare Benefits

For nearly three decades, the Children’s Now “Community” Health Outreach Initiative (CHOI) has been a valuable resource in Los Angeles County (County) that helps vulnerable children, families, and individuals get and stay enrolled in available state and federally funded healthcare benefit programs. From 2003 through Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-2020, CHOI navigators have assisted more than 569,000 children and adults in the County to apply for health benefits. CHOI navigators often follow enrollees for at least one year to provide important case management services that help especially vulnerable residents – like seniors and persons with disabilities or mental health or substance abuse disorders – connect to critical healthcare services. They answer complex questions on benefit eligibility and services, estate recovery rules, health plan and provider choice, access to specialty care services (radiology, surgery, chemotherapy, etc.), COVID-19 vaccination and testing, and immigrant eligibility issues. They also help clients navigate health appointments, benefits, and services. CHOI navigators train the County’s network of health promoters, train staff in multiple County programs, such as Nurse Family Partnership, and ensure that accurate information is being shared with families and individuals. This training was especially critical as the County expanded the number of health promoters to help conduct outreach for COVID-19 testing and vaccination. Finally, CHOI navigators report their activities through a web-based database developed by the

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Department of Public Health (DPH) and community agencies that tracks their performance and outcomes with great detail.

CHOI navigators have been an important resource to the County's schools. A recent [UCLA report](#) confirmed poor academic performance is often linked to poor healthcare access and untreated chronic health conditions, like asthma. The CHOI navigators support improved student achievement by training school districts and nurses on available community health resources and by assisting students and their families to apply for health coverage, when needed.

[Research](#) also confirms CHOI navigators both successfully reduce barriers to care and improve primary care access, especially in Latinx and other immigrant communities. CHOI navigators were particularly helpful with ensuring that residents understood Medi-Cal rules that changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in late March 2020, the State of California (State) imposed a "No Negative Action" rule to prevent unnecessary interruptions in health benefits during the pandemic by prohibiting the County from dropping anyone from Medi-Cal for any reason other than death, beneficiary request, or a move out of State. The State also implemented COVID-19 Uninsured Medi-Cal, which covers all treatment and hospitalizations for any eligible person, regardless of immigration status. CHOI navigators helped ensure residents understood these new programs and had uninterrupted access to healthcare and prescriptions during the pandemic.

It is especially critical that the County preserves the CHOI network as several significant Medi-Cal eligibility changes are on the horizon. Later this month, the State and County will implement Assembly Bill (AB) 133. AB 133 expands full-scope State funded Medi-Cal to all adults age 50 or older who do not have satisfactory immigration status or are unable to verify their immigration status or citizenship, but who otherwise meet Medi-Cal eligibility requirements. The Department of Health Services estimates nearly 85,000 County residents will become eligible for this new expanded Medi-Cal. Most of these residents will need help understanding how to access care in a managed care system.

The CHOI navigators would also be helpful as the State begins a massive effort to redetermine the Medi-Cal eligibility of approximately 14.5M Statewide beneficiaries. In

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the County, this redetermination exercise could affect the Medi-Cal eligibility of 4.2M beneficiaries and could mean the loss of health insurance coverage if forms are not completed timely.

CHOI Program Funding

DPH administers the CHOI program and funds 17 trusted nonprofit entities Countywide through Children's Health Outreach Enrollment, Utilization and Retention (CHOEUR) service contracts. On [June 11, 2021](#), DPH advised the Board of Supervisors that the nearly \$5M in CHOEUR contracts that fund the CHOI community-based organizations would sunset on March 31, 2022.

DPH has funded CHOEUR contracts through a variety of grants since 2003, when it first established the CHOI program. Initially, First 5 Los Angeles (F5LA) funded the program. In 2014, AB 82 funds supported the program after the F5LA funds expired. Subsequently, DPH used Senate Bill 18 to fund the contractors' Medi-Cal eligibility renewal efforts. After those funds expired, DPH utilized Medical Administrative Activities funds to extend the contracts. In FY 2019-2020, the County braided together six one-time funding streams from various County departments to continue the CHOI program. Finally, DPH used AB 74 funds to extend the CHOEUR agreement, but those funds were exhausted on March 31, 2022.

In mid-November of 2021, the California Department of Health Care Services notified DPH that it allocated an additional roughly \$1.3M to the CHOI program this fiscal year. This enhancement allowed DPH to fund the program and extend the CHOI contracts only through the end of this fiscal year. The CHOI contracts are currently set to expire on June 30, 2022.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in coordination with the Director of the Department of Public Health (DPH), to:
 - a. Evaluate any funding options, including additional funding from the State, to identify up to \$6.5 million in FY 2022-23 Final Changes budget to continue the Community Health Outreach Initiative (CHOI)

program, including the use of one-time Net County Cost if no other funding sources are available.

- b. Work with the Center for Strategic Partnerships and County Counsel to explore philanthropic funds to support the CHOI program, including opportunities to leverage philanthropic dollars to draw down Medicaid funds that would pay CHOI community-based organizations for their Medi-Cal administrative activities.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of DPH, or designee, to execute 18 contract amendments, which includes four sole source contract amendments, to extend the term through June 30, 2023 and increase the maximum contract sums for the continued provision of CHOI, if other funding sources are identified.
3. Direct the CEO, through the Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Division, to support State legislation (AB 2680 - Arambula) and other State budget measures for continued State funding to support CHOI program activities.